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SUBJECT: RESPECTED CIVIL SOCIETY LEADER FEARS NCP REVERSION TO
RADICALISM

REF A) KHARTOUM 1549
KHARTOUM 1504

1. (SBU) Summary: NCP members accepted numerous recommendations from civil society leaders at the Sudan People's Initiative, including the formation of a consultative Presidential Council, but have shown no interest in actually carrying them out, the SPI drafting chairman, Khartoum University Professor Tayeb Hajj Attia, told polchief in a meeting on December 3. Attia also stated that the NCP remains bitterly divided on the Darfur issue and it is unclear who (if anyone) is leading the Darfur portfolio, though President Bashir reportedly dispatched Dr. Nafie Ali Nafie to Qatar on December 2. Attia also stated that there was widespread discontent within the NCP over the lack of decisive leadership and that Presidential Advisor Dr. Ghazi Salahdeen and several other moderates have tendered their resignations in the past two weeks, though they were not accepted. He expressed grave concern that the regime's hardliners and Islamic fundamentalists were clustering around Bashir as its moderates were turning away, and feared the issuance of an ICC arrest warrant would only exacerbate this trend. End Summary.

NO HOPES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SPI RECOMMENDATIONS

2. (SBU) On December 3, polchief met with Professor Atayeb Hajj Attia, the Director of the Peace Research Center of the University of Khartoum who was enlisted at the last minute (despite his initial reluctance) to serve as Chairman of the Drafting Committee at the Sudan People's Initiative (SPI) in Kenana (ref A). His prominence at the SPI surprised many observers, perhaps none more than the professor himself. A mere week before the event, he had little interest in it and no plans to attend, preferring instead to continue his work on conflating the numerous civil society proposals on Darfur into a comprehensive background document (ref B). This changed when senior NCP officials approached him with a formal invitation. "I laid down conditions for my participation, and told them if they were not met I would walk away," he said.

3. (SBU) During the SPI, Attia was thrust into the role of advising President Bashir on protocol, agenda and other matters in Kenana. He characterized the closed door meetings with President Bashir and his close advisors as very positive, noting that "they accepted all of our recommendations," including the formation of a consultative Presidential Council. But he was pessimistic that any of the adopted recommendations would actually be implemented. "Once the final speeches were made, everyone packed up their bags and left," he said. "It's over."

NCP INTERNAL STRUGGLES

14. (SBU) Attia also noted that despite nominal and public consensus among the NCP, it was clear from the closed door sessions that key personnel remain divided on how to move forward in Darfur. "You could see the suppressed tensions," he said. "They tried their best not to reveal their differences in front of us (outsiders), but it was quite obvious," he said. It remains unclear who holds the lead on the Darfur portfolio, he said, noting that Salah Ghosh and representatives from the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) was conspicuously absent from the SPI, although many noted that Taha seemed to be calling the shots at Kenana, even silencing Nafie at one point. He also stated that President Bashir has sent Presidential Advisor Dr. Nafie Ali Nafie to Qatar, "but no one knows why." However, he was confident that there was "no way" that rebels would agree to meet with Nafie.

15. (SBU) Attia speculated that there was widespread discontent within the NCP and that the party was beginning to resemble a rudderless ship. "They're at a stage where no one is making decisions," he said. "There's no process or mechanisms. They're just drifting." Several senior NCP figures have tendered their resignations within the past two weeks he said, including moderate Presidential Advisor Dr. Ghazi Salahdeen. Ghazi's resignation was not accepted and the regime was trying to decide how to deal with this and other resignations, he said.

16. (SBU) Attia also expressed grave concern that the regime's hardliners and Islamic fundamentalists (such as Bashir's advisor on Koranic matters) were clustering around Bashir as its moderates were turning away. "They're telling him that by targeting him, the ICC is targeting Islam," he said. If the easily swayed Bashir becomes susceptible to these modes of thinking, "we should expect a withdrawal of moderate voices and a decision-making process that is

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completely obscured," he said. The issuance of an ICC arrest warrant would only exacerbate this situation, he said.

CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVE CONTINUES

17. (SBU) Despite his forecasts of doom and gloom, Attia plans to continue his vigorous work on compiling the proposals and recommendations of nine separate Darfurian civil society initiatives into one comprehensive background document, something he characterized as completely separate from the SPI. "This has nothing to do with the SPI whatsoever," he said. "It is a Darfurian document. We're just the editors," he said. The document will not offer recommendations, he said, but rather serve as a backgrounder for all the stakeholders of the Darfur crisis, including the international community. "There are many people who need something to read," he said.

18. (SBU) A 140-page draft of the backgrounder is in now existence and is expected to be completed within two weeks, said Attia, though funds to publish it are lacking and as of yet, no plans exist to translate it into English. Attia and his colleagues will attempt to have consultations with 200 stakeholders in Khartoum prior to its publication, as well as try and solicit the opinions of IDPs in El Fasher, Nyala and Geneina and possibly other locations if time permits. He had initially been hopeful that he could work with the UN's Abdul Mohamed of the DDDC to solicit the opinions of Darfurians but "I've learned my lesson not to trust him, because he only comes with empty promises and does not deliver."

19. (SBU) Comment: Professor Attia's predictions of an NCP reversion to radicalism may come off as a bit alarmist, though it is true that some moderates within the party have reportedly been unhappy with its direction of late (some would say that the struggle within the NCP is not about moderates and radicals but about who rules). The unprecedented level of stress placed on the regime from the crisis in the Darfur, the ICC indictment and (now) the falling price of oil requires decisive leadership, which hereto has been lacking and may now even be unraveling. Our understanding is that Bashir often prefers not to make decisions and therefore relies on decision-making by committee, a process through which the more hard-line elements of the regime often carry the day. With regard to

the civil society initiative, it is frustrating to see someone as thoughtful and well-intentioned as Professor Attia content to produce a mere background document. As substantive and as connected to the people of Darfur as it may be, without specific policy recommendations this document is unlikely to influence the intermittent Darfur peace process in a significant way.

FERNANDEZ